

# New departmental records for Dpto. La Paz, Bolivia, from the Pampas del Heath

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The Bolivian Pampas del Heath is a large (about 300 km<sup>2</sup>), humid savanna and grassland in northern La Paz Department, located to the south of the Rio Madre de Dios, east of the Rio Heath, and west of the Rio Asunta. The grasslands fall largely within the boundaries of the recently declared 1.89 m hectare Madidi National Park, which is an extremely well preserved example of the transition from Andean crest to western Amazonian habitats. The Pampas del Heath is a very rare example of an essentially pristine large savanna—never grazed by cattle, and with no permanent human settlements, or history thereof. Its inclusion within Madidi National Park is thus a major step forward in the conservation of Neotropical grasslands and savannas.

Up until now there has been no scientific survey of any aspect of the Bolivian Pampas del Heath, although the much smaller Peruvian equivalent is better known (Denevan 1980, Parker & Bailey 1991, and references to unpublished data therein, Foster *et al.* 1994). As part of our ongoing programme to document the biodiversity of northern Bolivia, TREX (Foundation for Tropical Research and Exploration) undertook a preliminary survey of these unknown grasslands between 20 July and 6 August 1995. Our focus was a rapid conservation assessment of the area, looking at plants, reptiles and amphibians, and selected insect groups (Helme *et al.* in prep.).

Our study site coordinates were approximately 13°01' S, 68°49' W, with a mean altitude of 200 m. During our three weeks of fieldwork, two cold fronts (*surazos*) passed through, on each occasion producing about 50 mm of rain, temporarily flooding large parts of the grasslands. The grasslands are entirely surrounded by lowland tall forest, and are a complex mosaic of seasonally inundated grasslands dominated by grasses (especially *Leptocoryphium lanatum*) and sedges, raised termite mounds that harbour various shrub communities (particularly species of Melastomataceae), forest islands with species such as *Vismia* spp., *Xylopia* sp., various Rubiaceae, *Graffenriedia limbata*, and *Maprounea guianensis*, and mauritiales (permanently wet palm swamps dominated by the large palm *Mauritia flexuosa*).

Although birds were not the focus of this expedition, I noted the five following species, which are new records for La Paz Department (*sensu* Angel *et al.* 1995):

## PLUMBEOUS IBIS *Theristicus caerulescens*

A pair seen foraging in flooded grassland on two consecutive days (27–28 July).

## YELLOW-HEADED CARACARA *Milvago chimachima*

A pair seen once, flying southeast over open grassland (22 July).

**GIANT SNIPE** *Gallinago undulata*

An individual of this exceptionally large, rufous-rumped snipe flushed from flooded grassland (29 July). The bird flew off low and silent, in a straight line, for about 200 m before settling. This is ideal habitat for this lowland, wet grassland snipe, but is only the second record for Bolivia, the first being a recent record from Noel Kempff National Park in northeastern Santa Cruz Department (Meyer 1995). A new addition to Remsen & Parker's (1995) list of expected species.

**SWALLOW-TAILED HUMMINGBIRD** *Eupetomena macroura*

Locally common where there were sufficient plants in flower, throughout the forest islands and larger shrub patches. Regularly seen visiting *Vochysia mapiensis* trees in late evening (23–29 July), sometimes in aggressive groups of 2–4 males, who actively chased each other in the vicinity of the trees.

**GREY MONJITA** *Xolmis cinerea*

One of the commonest birds in open grassland and grassland with termite mounds (20 July–6 August).

Various species were recorded that are not new records for the Department, but that appear in Remsen & Parker (1995) as "Expected" within the Madidi National Park. These are thus new records for the Park, and are noted below:

**MAGUARI STORK** *Ciconia maguari*

Four individuals seen on the Bolivian bank of the Rio Heath (20 July).

**LESSER YELLOW-HEADED VULTURE** *Cathartes burrovianus*

Single bird perched on forest margin tree (28 July).

**LONG-WINGED HARRIER** *Circus buffoni*

One adult seen quartering over grassland (22 July).

**SHORT-TAILED HAWK** *Buteo brachyurus*

A single adult seen flying south at about 100 m over the grasslands (23 July).

**COMMON POTOO** *Nyctibus griseus*

Heard at night along grassland edge, throughout the study period.

**TOCO TOUCAN** *Rhamphastos toco*

Seen irregularly throughout the study period in tall riverine forest along the Rio Heath.

**POINT-TAILED PALMCREEPER** *Berlepschia rikeri*

This characteristic resident of *Mauritia* palm swamps was heard regularly and occasionally seen in the abundant suitable habitat in the centre of the Pampas del Heath (21 July–2 August).

**FORK-TAILED FLYCATCHER** *Tyrannus savana*

Single birds seen in recently burned grassland (28 July).

**WEDGE-TAILED GRASS-FINCH** *Emberizoides herbicola*

Common in the grasslands throughout the study period.

A further species of interest is the second Bolivian record of Olive-striped Flycatcher *Mionectes olivaceus*. We obtained a specimen of this bird (25 July, now lodged in Colección Boliviana de Fauna, La Paz) in the riverine forest along the Rio Heath, and later regularly observed the species in similar habitat.

These very preliminary observations hint at the need for further work in the area, especially in the light of Remsen & Parker (1995), who suggest that over 1100 species of bird could theoretically be recorded from within the boundaries of Madidi National Park—more than 600 of these are still to be recorded.

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